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ABSTRACT

Directed to the local government of smaller cities, this guide discusses five techniques for valid and feasible citizen participation. In each of the five selections the author describes the technique and indicates when its use is appropriate and what both its advantages and disadvantages are. The sections are arranged in order from the least to the most technical: (1) community development goal setting, (2) neighborhood meetings, (3) advisory committees, (4) the nominal group process (NGP), and (5) citizen surveys. In the first section the steps involved in a community development effort are described that lead to the establishment of goals and methods of accomplishing them. The section on neighborhood meetings stresses the benefit of them in improving trust and credibility in government. The section on advisory groups points out the need for representativeness of committee members, for group members to understand their role clearly, and for adequate staff assistance. The next section discusses NGP, a highly structured process for small groups yielding definite results that are quite usable as a basis for decision making, planning, and/or goal setting. In the final detailed section on citizen surveys the problems of collecting usable data are set forth. This section is more detailed than the others because of the popularity and complexity of citizen surveys. (YLB)

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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION:

A Manual of Techniques

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INTRODUCTION

Charldean Newell

Citizen participation has become a key element of local government in the past fifteen years. On the one hand, elected officials and professional staff members have no choice but to allow citizen input into the decisions, programs, and/or services of the city. The terms of many federal grants, the increasing frequency of informal citizens' groups noisily demanding to be heard, the fears of both litigation and violence have all mandated citizen participation in the modern community. On the other hand, many city officials genuinely seek the thinking of the citizenry. Recognizing their roles as representatives of the community, these officials want to know which problems the public thinks are acute, which services they think most important, and which programs they feel may or should be deleted.

A mayor, council member, manager, or department head who merely deems it politically expedient to allow citizen participation is rarely concerned about the effectiveness of that participation. It is thus our assumption that anyone taking the time to read this guide sincerely desires to know what the public is thinking, to allow citizens to influence governmental decisions, and even to shape programs that the citizens have clearly indicated are important. However, having a genuine interest in citizen participation and insuring that participation is meaningful are two different things.

Proposition 13 in California represents one type of effective citizen participation: the public got what it wanted, lower taxes, through the ballot box. However, our interest is in less spectacular and more

constructive techniques of citizen involvement. And our particular concern is to provide some basic information on techniques that have proved workable so that city officials can choose an approach that meets the needs of their particular community.

For smaller cities, the problem of achieving effective participation is especially critical. Small cities have neither the funds nor the personnel to employ highly sophisticated and very costly techniques. They cannot hire a professional staff member with a specialty in participation techniques. Yet their need for adequate, valid citizen input is as great as that of larger cities whose budgets permit them to designate a staff member responsible for organizing public participation. Because of our concern for the special problems of smaller cities, this guide is specifically directed to them. However, it is usable by any local government regardless of size.

Five techniques are discussed in some detail. Each is a device that will result in citizen involvement that is (1) valid, i.e., participation that will provide true representations of popular opinion, and (2) feasible, i.e., participation that can be accomplished by non-technical personnel for small sums of money. It is the second concern, feasibility, that is geared to the restrictions faced by smaller communities.

An elected official or professional staff member who wishes to use one or more of the techniques described in this volume should read about all of them before selecting one. Indeed, one of the most common reasons why well-meant efforts at citizen participation go awry is that the wrong technique was chosen. Thus, knowing <u>how</u> to use a technique is only part of the route to having a satisfied public. Knowing <u>which</u> technique to use and then following through on the information and opinions solicited completes the picture.

In each of the selections, the author has not only described the technique but has indicated when its use is appropriate and what both its advantages and disadvantages are. These points are important so that the wrong technique will not be selected. For example, while a survey may be very helpful in determining citizen attitudes on how well a selected list of city services is being performed, it is poor method for setting long-term goals. Similarly, while the Nominal Group Process is very useful for establishing priorities on a narrow topic, it is ineffective as a means of getting information on how frequently citizens utilize various municipal services. Thus, again, the official needs to consider all the techniques before deciding on one to use.

The sections in which individual techniques are described are arranged roughly in order from the least technical to the most technical. Thus, the first section concerns Community Development Goal Setting. In it, John T. Thompson describes the steps involved in a community development effort that leads to the establishment of goals and methods of accomplishing them. He points out the need for the undertaking to be genuinely a community-wide project and the difficulty of insuring broad-scale participation. A goal-setting effort in Denton, for which Thompson served as coordinator, is used as an example.

In the next section, Jerry L. Yeric points out that Neighborhood Meetings do open communication channels and may well improve the sense of neighborhood among participants. However, the results are often indefinite, and confining discussion to a few topics is generally impossible. The greatest benefit of neighborhood meetings is improving trust and credibility in government, but their abuse may well have the opposite effect.

James J. Glass wrote two sections. His first, on Advisory Groups, points out the need for representativeness of committee members, for group members to understand their role clearly, and for adequate staff assistance. Such groups can provide decision-making input and can help educate other citizens and gain their support for programs. Glass points out, though, that they can easily be turned into nothing more than spokespersons for the program or department which they are supposedly advising and can easily become sham organizations designed to achieve minimal compliance with federal grants.

In his second section, Glass discusses the Nominal Group Process, the technique with which probably the fewest readers are acquainted. NGP is a highly structured process for small groups and yields definite results that are quite usable as a basis for decision making, planning, and/or goal setting. At the same time, it is not suitable for large groups or for broad topics.

In the concluding section, John R. Todd discusses Citizen Surveys. Surveys are often seized upon by cities as the "ideal answer to the participation prayer." However, for a survey to result in usable data, it must be done very carefully by persons with specialized skills. Surveys are easily undermined by poor sampling technique, the selection of poorly worded questions, or the inclusion of issues too technical for laymen to comprehend. They also are abused if they are employed as a substitute for responsible decision making on the part of elected officials or if the results are totally ignored. Because of the popularity and the complexity of citizen surveys, this section is more detailed than the others. If, after reading about it, the city official feels that this technique may require some professional help if it is to be effective, such was our intent.

Each of the authors is a member of the Department of Political Science at North Texas State University; so also is the individual who prepared this introduction and edited the other sections. All will be involved in two conference-workshops in September and November 1978 in which these techniques will be elaborated and demonstrated. This guide, the conferences, and the availability of the conference leaders to assist cities are all made possible through a Title IA, Higher Education Act of 1965, grant to the NTSU University Center for Community Services from the Coordinating Board, Texas College and University System.

GOAL SETTING

John T. Thompson

Local communities traditionally provided a sense of community and neighborliness--a place where people could live and raise their families, voice their concerns, and make a contribution to the decisions that shaped their own as well as their collective destiny. In recent decades, however, there has been a growing sense of loss of community, coupled with a feeling of impotence to affect the tide of events. Ordinary citizens, wherever they live, have increasing difficulty in experiencing a sense of belonging and participation in the community. As a result, many become alienated and lose not only their initiative to act but also those generous impulses that grow out of an awareness of a local common good.

The process of community development is one effort to recapture the sense of community and to overcome alienation. It is an attempt to rediscover local initiative through a process which involves people from all walks of life in identifying and working for shared aims and goals. A host of communities have undertaken community goal-setting programs in recent years. Perhaps the best known in the state is the very successful Goals for Dallas program. But many other communities, such as Denton, in its Decisions for Denton program, also have sought to involve the entire community in determining commonly shared aims and goals. Furthermore, many of the recent federal laws dealing with urban problems have incorporated provisions requiring citizen participation and aspects of the community development process.

The purpose of this section is to describe the goal-setting process of community development and to share the author's experience in the Denton community development effort, Decisions for Denton.

What Needs To Be Done?

There is no simple "how to" handbook or formula on community development. Community development is a social process. It aims at the participation of increasingly large numbers of people seeking to identify and solve community problems. It involves the interrelationships of numerous individuals, groups, and institutions--the whole community in fact, and in many instances other communities, as well as regional and even national organizations. It seeks to encourage local initiative and to improve communication. No formula or recipe that gives steps to be taken in a prescribed sequence, therefore, is possible. Instead, an outline of a technique is presented here and provides a modifiable pattern to guide those who seek to contribute to the process of community development.

The Basic Nucleus.--Initiative rarely occurs on an unplanned basis. Someone or some group has to initiate the idea and provide the impetus to get a group of people together to explore the possibilities of a community problem-solving and goal-setting effort. This initial action may come from any number of individuals or groups. Chambers of Commerce, university extension agencies, churches, city planning commissions, as well as small groups of active individuals in the community are typical groups responsible for initiating community goal-setting projects.

The nucleus group provides invaluable functions. It is this group which initially considers the need to do something and explores possible actions that might be taken. Like a pebble dropped into a pond, it causes the first ripples, which, if successful, invite and lead others to join in the cause.

The nucleus group for the Decisions for Denton program consisted of several members from the Chamber of Commerce and the director of a newly formed North Texas State University/Texas Woman's University joint extension agency. This group met to explore the needs and advantages of undertaking a project similar to Dallas' goals study. There was general agreement that Denton had problems and needed the direction that a goals study could provide. Enthusiasm grew as the group discussed the possibilities of a community-wide effort. Each member of the nucleus group offered to help in the project, and the Chamber of Commerce leaders agreed to support the project in several ways. Not only would they encourage their members to participate, they agreed to provide some staff help and to bear the cost of publishing the goals statement produced by the community. Dangers of the project's becoming a Chamber undertaking were discussed, and it was felt that many individuals and groups would not participate if it appeared to be solely a Chamber scheme. The universities' representative also agreed to assist in the project and to use his office and staff as a clearing house; thus the university extension director become the project coordinator. Finally, in an attempt to get organized, the group decided to enlist support of other civic groups, agencies, and the public at large.

Organizational Phase.--Once a nucleus group in a community has agreed to undertake a goal-setting, problem-solving project, it becomes necessary to enlist additional individuals and groups and to organize in a way to facilitate the proposed goals study. How this is done will depend on local conditions in each community.

In Denton's experience, first a number of informal recruitment meetings were held with various civic groups. The nucleus group also contacted

individuals who were known to be concerned with various community problems, or who were or had been active in community affairs, or who held key positions in business, community organizations, voluntary groups, or government. Finally the public-at-large was invited to participate. A number of articles describing the proposed goal-setting project were published in the local newspaper, and citizens were encouraged to attend meetings or call the coordinator for information.

Decisions about how the Decisions for Denton project would be organized were made by the expanded nucleus group. A number of committees were created to consider various aspects of community life. Ten committees including an executive committee made up of the chairpersons of the other committees and the coordinator of the project (the university extension director) comprised the organization. Chairpersons of each committee were to be elected at the first meeting of the committee.

Committees were asked to first consider the present state of the community--where are we at the present, our assets and liabilities. Next, they were to consider what we would like to be--to dream a little bit and consider what are our aims and goals. Finally, the committees were to look at alternative ways of reaching these goals and to propose action programs that would bring them into reality. These committee recommendations of goals and for actions were ultimately to be presented for adoption at a community-wide meeting.

The coordinator of the project was to assist the committees. He was to arrange for the public meetings, obtain resource persons to provide information, arrange for research, release publicity, call and remind persons of meetings, and continue recruiting persons into the project.

Discussion Phase.--Most vital to the entire community development process is getting people to share and communicate their ideas and

aspirations with one another. Therefore, committee meetings need to be scheduled at a convenient time, and an open climate needs to be maintained to encourage free discussion. Everyone should be encouraged to participate and be given ample time to express his or her views. How the discussion phase will be organized and conducted again depends upon local conditions.

In Denton, the committee meetings were scheduled in the evenings and were conducted in an open fashion to encourage free discussion. In the first phase, when considering the present state of the community, various city and business leaders were asked to report on present conditions and problems. Ample time was given for questions, and a general discussion followed the presentations. Questions which required additional information or research were referred to the coordinator, who was responsible for finding persons who knew the answers or could research the matter for the committee. This information or resource person was brought to the committee at a later time.

Meetings held in a climate conducive to free exchange of ideas became even more important once the committee began to consider the aspirations or goals of the community. Special efforts were made to ensure that all individuals who might be affected by various proposals be present, and often they were asked to speak about their preferences. The coordinator personally invited members of groups that normally do not participate fully in community affairs. Youth, older citizens, minority groups, apartment dwellers, and others were sought out to ensure that their views were heard in the goal-setting process.

Following these meetings, the committee chairman and the coordinator attempted to draft goals reflecting the consensus of the participants. Normally, there was first a broad, general statement which reflected

almost everyone's opinion, then specific goal statements which some members felt should be included. These statements of goals were duplicated and sent to all persons present at the meeting. At the next meeting, there was a discussion on the draft statements, and agreement was sought as to the stated goals. In several instances, there were basic differences on specific goals and both views were forwarded by the committee to the community-wide forum for its decision.

The final step in the discussion phase was to consider alternative actions for solving perceived needs and problems in the community. Resource persons again were used to help the group know what could be done. After full consideration of the alternative actions, the group was asked to recommend particular actions to be taken. The committee's report to the community forum included a discussion of all the alternative actions considered and the recommendation of the group.

Goal Adoption Phase.--Community goals finally need to be approved by the community at large. After they are fully publicized in the newspaper, they are discussed and approved at a town forum-type meeting.

In Denton this meeting was a half-day program held in the Community Center, and over 400 people attended. City, county, and school district officials were present and took part in the process, and, in a sense, were coopted to carry out the actions called for in the plan.

Finally, a publication, Decisions for Denton, which included the goals and statements agreed upon by the community, was published and distributed throughout the community.

Action Phase.--The executive committee of Decisions for Denton was instructed to follow up on the various proposals for action and to report to the community periodically. Fortunately, the Chamber of Commerce

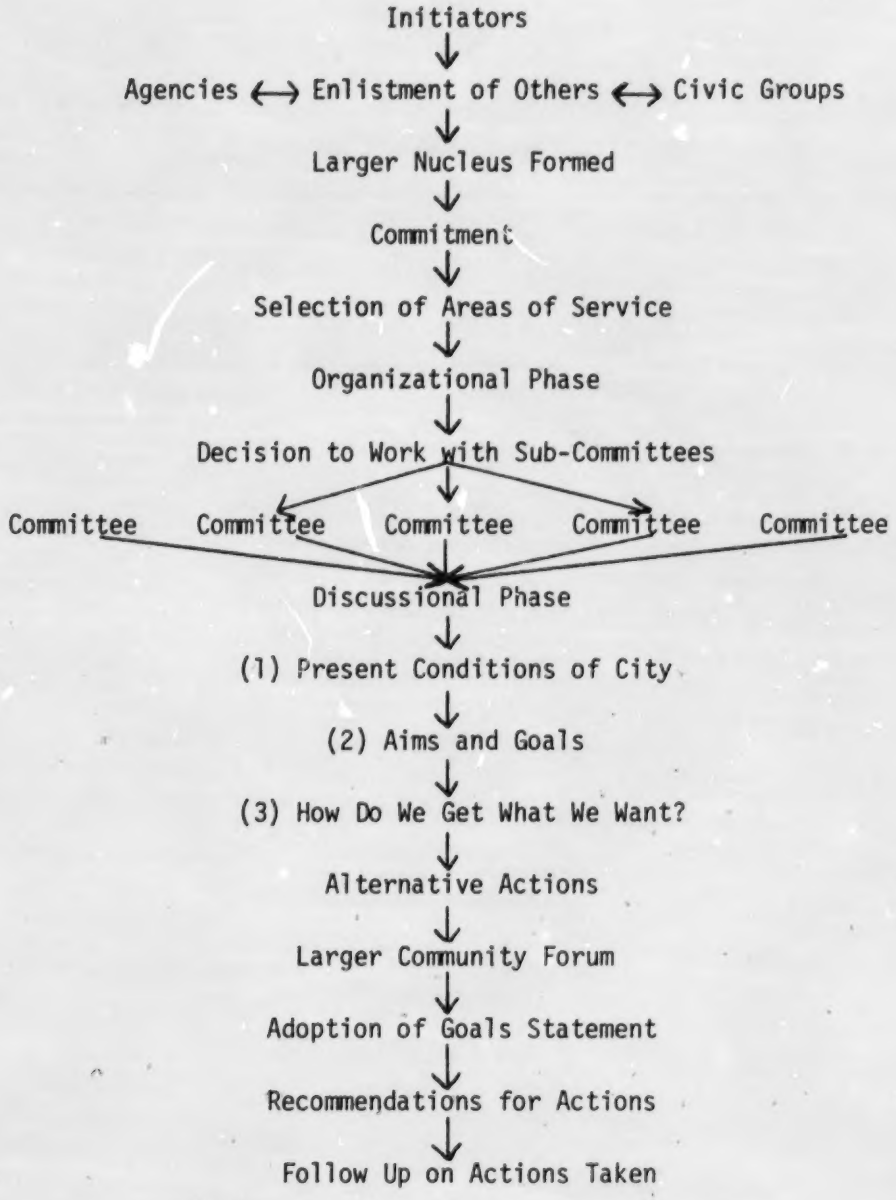
provided a forum to keep the group together and functioning. At the end of one year, the committee reported through the newspaper that most of the recommendations were either accomplished or were under way. Among the successes were such things as the development of a civic theatre; the construction of two flood control dams; plans for several community centers, including a facility for senior citizens; the construction of a girls' gym at the high school; plus a number of others. Even more important, the community development experience gave people a sense of local initiative, a feeling that they were in control of their community. This mass educational experience in community action also helped develop a number of new civic leaders.

Finally, the Decisions for Denton experience encouraged other planning efforts by the city government. Since the Decisions for Denton project was completed, the city has undertaken a planning process to update the master plan. To a large degree the same community processes were used. Once the plan was updated, a capital budgeting process was begun which also involved the same processes for getting citizen involvement. In effect, there has been a continuous community development process in Denton for the past ten years which might be attributed to efforts of the original nucleus group for Decisions for Denton.

Overview of the Community Development Process

Basically community development is a process of mobilizing ever-increasing numbers of citizens to solve community problems. The growing awareness of a wider community tends to lead toward a social entity, a recapturing of the sense of community. This process is shown in the diagram below.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A PROCESS OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT*



*Adapted from William and Loureide J. Biddle, The Community Development Process, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 110.

Community Development in Perspective

There are a number of factors about community development which should be recognized. First, planning is political. People do have different preferences, aims, and values, and these will not go away through community discussions. Political conflict, however, may work to bring about needed changes in the community.

A second factor is that it is difficult to get general participation in community affairs. While some people are concerned with one or more issues that personally affect them, few are interested in community affairs generally. As a result, it is difficult to get general involvement. Furthermore, many people do not participate in community affairs at all, and even with the best effort, many will not participate. As a result, the so-called elites or community actives are the ones mainly involved in the community development process.

Finally, it should be pointed out that community development processes change the political environment. For one thing, expectations of some groups are increased. Furthermore, new groups are pulled into community affairs and among this group there is often a new militancy, and political militancy often results in greater political conflict.

Community development and citizen participation obviously are not a panacea, but they are in keeping with our democratic tradition. They do encourage self-reliance to shape one's own destiny, and these advantages, in the author's mind, far outweigh the problems and disadvantages.

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

Jerry L. Yeric

History and Functions

All too often today, the citizen, or neighbor, is not concerned with the mechanics of the daily operation of his local government. This disinterest is partly due to his natural instinct to "let George do it," and partly it results from a belief that government is so complex and intricate that he cannot understand what is going on anyway. However, if we can learn anything from the passage of California's Proposition 13, and the growing number of states that are amidst similar proposals, it ought to be that these old views of government are undergoing rapid change. More significantly, we ought to note that taxpayers' revolts and similar expressions of discontent are not an attack upon the government far away in Washington, at least not directly, but on those governments which are nearest to the people--state and local.

The question that is central to all local communities is, what is a feasible and practical method of communication with the citizen? While there are many different answers to this question depending upon what the needs of the community are at a particular time, the simplest and the one that may have a lasting imprint upon the community is direct communication in neighborhood meetings. It is indeed ironic that a method of governance that once was the rule is now the exception. During the 1890's and early 1900's, the neighborhood meeting was frequently used to communicate with diverse ethnic and social elements within a community.

The lifestyle of the citizens was not so complex as it is today; however, their interest in politics was keener, due mainly to the direct personal contact of the citizen with the people in government. Presently

there appears to be a resurgence of the values that accompanied government during the less complex days of the turn of the century--more direct contact with city officials, the inclusion of the citizen's views in city programs and priorities, greater accountability by the government, and desire of a sense of "community." The difficulty many cities bring upon themselves is that they view "community" only in a physical sense, i.e., roads, parks, libraries, et cetera; however, the demand is for community in a psychological sense--one of belonging.

Neighborhoods do not necessarily follow neat and clearly defined lines of roads, rivers, or other natural divisions. There is a psychological aspect to neighborhoods that is all too often overlooked in the participation process. Within communities there are people who "feel" close to one another for a variety of reasons, none of which has anything to do with physical spacing. Characteristics such as sociability, interpersonal relationships, mutual aid, organized base reference groups, and status areas all are part of "neighborhoods." These may be within a natural geographical surrounding, but not necessarily. It is the first function of government to recognize the constituency!

What is a neighborhood meeting? Quite simply it is the direct interaction of city officials with a small group of citizens who share a common element. This element might be an organizational structure such as a church, social club, or association. It might also be a geographic sub-unit of the city where the citizens are fairly likely to know their neighbors at least by sight and an occasional conversation.

Neighborhoods vary vastly in terms of the degree of interaction among the members, but because neighborhoods are composed of persons of similar social and economic status, they also represent units of similar

values, attitudes, and opinions. The singularly most important difference between the neighborhoods of the turn of the century and those of today is that in the neighborhoods of the 1900's people knew one another, families interacted on a daily basis, and the problems of one family were the problems of the neighborhood to solve. Today there is frequently a distinct lack of communication between neighbors, and it is because of this that the concept of neighborhood meetings is gaining popularity and acceptance. A neighborhood meeting has two functions: (1) to allow the citizens to communicate with the governmental official, and--perhaps more important--(2) to help neighbors get acquainted better by bringing them together. Thus, the neighborhood meeting is doubly important in the 1970's and 1980's, for part of the frustration of the citizen toward government is his frustration toward community and the lack of "togetherness" that is normally associated with the term "neighborhood." The cities that seize the initiative to use the neighborhood concept as a regular and positive factor in the city's development will not only make the difficult problems of government a bit more tolerable but will build a community that has a strong solid foundation.

Why the reluctance to use the neighborhood meeting today? Unfortunately, the term "neighborhood meeting" all too often has a negative connotation associated with it for several reasons. First, the misuses of the urban political machines during the turn of the century still linger. Although these fears are seldom justified in today's society, most cities are no longer highly organized politically and can seldom deliver the rewards and services that are associated with machine politics. A second reason is that many programs of the 1960's (such as Model Cities) required some type of "neighborhood" involvement. And in many

cases this produced highly factionalized groups both within the program's target group and within city hall. Finally, the use of neighborhood meetings has been too closely associated with the planning process of the city. As a result, city officials often call for a neighborhood meeting to "review" plans for parks or improvements, only to find hostile citizens waiting with a wide variety of questions--some of which are directed at the program on the agenda. The result is that the officials leave with very little usable information and a great deal of frustration.

Setting Up the Meeting

Organizing a neighborhood meeting, or a series of such meetings, is not so simple as it seems. Indeed, because a successful, effective neighborhood meeting is more complicated than it appears, this section began with a history of neighborhood meetings to point out the importance of identifying the target neighborhood(s) and understanding that such meetings fell into disrepute when they were abused in the past.

Basically, however, the steps involved in setting up a neighborhood meeting are these:

1. The target neighborhood(s) must be clearly identified.
2. City officials and city staff should have some advance contact with acknowledged neighborhood leaders to gain their support and to get a sense of what issues are likely to arise.
3. A suitable meeting site must be arranged, usually a school or other public building, such as a municipal recreation center. (Attendance will usually be two to five percent of the neighborhood.)
4. The forthcoming meeting must be carefully publicized. Generally, local newspapers consider such city activities newsworthy and

will run news stories about the upcoming meeting. Similarly, broadcasters (radio and TV) will usually make public service announcements. At the same time press publicity is being sought, reporters can also be invited to attend the meetings. In addition to media publicity, however, if at all possible, some type of announcement should be mailed to each home in the neighborhood: a postal card sent at bulk mail rates will suffice, but the city should allow about three weeks since bulk mail is sometimes very slow in arriving. The day, time, place, and purpose of the meeting should be clear.

5. Those elected officials and/or staff members most familiar with the issues likely to arise should be present and prepared to answer questions. They might even bring along audio-visual aids to help answer questions, so long as the session isn't turned into a "show and tell" for the city without adequate interchange with the citizens.
6. The city representatives who are present at the meeting should be patient. If a city regularly has neighborhood meetings, then it is possible discussion will be confined to a relatively narrow range of issues. However, if no meeting has been held for some time (or never been held), the citizens will tend to bring up every topic they are concerned about because they will see the meeting as a rare opportunity to be heard at city hall.
7. Also, the city officials should be prepared to consider the opinions and suggestions made at the meeting. If the meeting is only a pretense--designed either as a "selling" session for some municipal decision that has already been made or as an

"appeasement" session to let citizens air their complaints--without any intent to follow up on the discussion, in the long run the city's relationship with its citizenry will be harmed rather than helped. While there will be no way to accommodate all the suggestions, followup is important.

More information on what results can be expected from a neighborhood meeting is detailed in the following subsection.

Results

What type of information can be obtained in the neighborhood meeting? Unlike most other means of citizen participation (surveys, advisory committees, and goal setting groups), the type of information obtained through the neighborhood meeting lacks structure and often raises as many questions as it answers. Yet, few other forms of information gathering approach the neighborhood meeting in terms of the citizen's sense of involvement or engender such a positive feeling toward the "democratic" process. So, while handicaps occur with the data itself, the personal and psychological benefits are unparalleled. Yet various types of information, useful to the city, can be obtained. Information from such meetings has the following characteristics:

1. The information is gathered in an unstructured manner and usually is not so detailed as other methods of citizen participation. An advantage to this approach is that it affords the citizen the opportunity to set his or her own importance on a variety of issues. Should one or two issues receive most of the attention, the task of interpreting the citizen's concerns is clear and straightforward. If, on the other hand, no issue emerges, then the official is left with a difficult task, one of

selecting the priorities as he or she views them.

2. The range of topics and information is usually very wide. Discussion may range from general policies such as attitudes toward future growth, recreational projects, and expenditures of monies to very specific attitudes toward street maintenance in the neighborhood or in front of a participant's home. All are within the range of a single meeting.
3. Misinformation is a very common problem in the neighborhood meeting situation. Citizens will not have the proper or complete information concerning a particular project or program and will react to what they "believe" to be the case. City officials may also come to meetings misinformed, for example, about the seriousness of a problem in the neighborhood or the existence of a problem. Firsthand communications cannot be replaced by any other form of participation. Both parties have the opportunity to learn and to clarify the extent of the problems on a face-to-face basis.

One of the most common problems in the use of neighborhood meetings is that information received in them is often very hard to interpret due to conflicting points of view among neighbors, varying levels of articulateness, and the difficulty of assessing whether those in attendance are representative of the neighborhood or are merely a small vocal group. However, each of these difficulties can be minimized if regular interaction with neighborhoods is established, for the members of the city staff will become sensitized to the neighborhood, its members, and its problems.

Information coming from such meetings cannot compare with survey data in terms of neatness of analysis, precision, or specificity. It will take

repeated interaction with a neighborhood before accurate assessments will become easier and more frequent. In the final analysis, the nature of the information produced at neighborhood meetings is unstructured, wide-ranged, and often misleading, all of which make the task of analysis difficult and time consuming. As a result, many cities have not wished to spend the time to develop techniques or objectives that would institute a workable program of such meetings. It is easier to appoint a committee ("let George do it") than to develop the program oneself. But the question is, what objectives can be obtained by the use of neighborhood meetings?

Objectives and Hazards

The neighborhood meeting provides a format that is extremely flexible in terms of objectives sought, depending upon a given situation. Any public involvement program is very important, not only to comply with the law, but perhaps more importantly, to comply with the principles of democratic decision making.

1. The basic objective of the neighborhood meeting is to establish trust and credibility. The effectiveness of government, regardless of the level, is only as good as the degree of trust and credibility between those making the decisions and those whose support is essential. The face-to-face exchange of views is the best method to foster these objectives.
2. Related to trust and credibility is the opportunity to exchange information in a "common" environment and language. The professional "jargon," the political "rhetoric" of campaigns, and mass public statements are put aside.
3. Another objective of the meeting is that of education. Problems in the neighborhood are translated for the officials to consider,

and problems of governance of the city can be explained and misinformation reduced.

4. Neighborhood meetings can be used to determine ways of reducing conflict--conflict between citizens and government, conflict between neighbors, and conflict within government itself.
5. Finally, these meetings can help develop a sense of neighborhood cooperation among residents themselves. It is a way to bring people together with a common objective, making their neighborhood and city a better place to live. This objective is particularly important in today's society where people have a tendency to avoid interchange with their neighbors unless a "someone else" initiates the first step.

The neighborhood meeting is not without risks to the public officials involved. While the primary goal of such a meeting is to develop trust and credibility, there is always the danger that the reverse (loss of credibility) will occur. Second, if the meeting is not prepared for properly (anticipating the neighborhood's concerns, familiarization with socio-economic environment, and some pre-preparation on expected issues are important--it must be remembered that the official does represent city government), or if it is a very infrequent occurrence, then hos- t ty toward government in general and city officials in particular may occur. The loss of public support--the direct opposite goal of the neighborhood meeting--is then the final product. Indeed, citizens are especially infuriated if city officials fall into the habit of calling ndighborhood meetings very infrequently and for the sole purpose of "selling" a decision already made and no longer open to citizen input.

How then can the neighborhood meeting best be used? What can the city official do to guard against the negative possibilities and encourage the positive. To achieve the maximum results, the official should:

1. Be familiar with the community in view of "possible" neighborhood sub-divisions. Most everyone who has been active in politics goes through a process that is very similar to this. The difference might be that, for the purpose of neighborhood meetings, even smaller sub-divisions of the community are desirable. Remember: this does not mean only geographic units.
2. Plan regular meetings with the members of the neighborhoods. These may take the form of attendance at picnics, social club meetings, coffees at individuals' homes. The frequency will be dictated to some degree by the size of the community. However, the importance of frequent interaction cannot be over-emphasized; it is the key to successful participation. Regularized meetings does not mean a specific day or month; rather sometime during a month or two, or three. The purpose is <u>exposure</u> of city employees as well as elected officials.
3. Make contact with citizens in the designated neighborhood. In the initial stages citizens "active" in community affairs might be used to help establish the meeting sites, agenda, time, and format. Caution: a real effort must be made not to become too dependent on any one person or group within the neighborhood. Also, as many members of the city staff as possible should be used to help in the initial contacts. Opening up the task of making contacts to all city employees has a beneficial by-product, the development of closer relations among city personnel, thus increasing productivity and morale.

4. Attempt to involve the citizens as much as possible in the process, for the more they are involved, the easier it is to achieve the objectives and goals.
5. Take care that initial meetings do not include controversial items; they should instead focus on items of common agreement and concern. The purpose is to put the citizen at ease and develop a relaxed environment, so that when more controversial issues arise, they can be handled with a minimum amount of anxiety.

To be effective, the neighborhood meeting approach to citizen participation should be regularized part of the governing process. Citizens will need to learn, through frequent meetings, that city officials are concerned about their problems. However, an entire staff or council does not need to meet regularly within neighborhoods; rather, some official from the city ought to be available to the neighborhood on a regularized basis. Cities should avoid having the same person or persons attending these meetings; instead, a rotation might be desirable because the primary function of the neighborhood meeting is to increase communication and credibility. For maximum results, exposure of city officials to citizens and vice versa should occur in a relaxed and sociable atmosphere. The neighborhood meeting is the foundation for other communication and support of government's action. The main objective is to create an atmosphere that reduces hostility and suspicion.

Additional Sources of Information on Neighborhood Meetings

O'Brien, David J. Neighborhood Organization and Interest Group Processes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Federal Highway Administration. Effective Citizen Participation in Transportation Planning, Volume II, A Catalog of Techniques. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Transportation, 1976, 130-142.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

James J. Glass

Advisory committees are perhaps the most often used and the most often abused technique of citizen participation. The use of the citizen advisory committee began long before the current popularity of citizen participation. Today, as citizen participation techniques continue to grow in both number and technical sophistication, the advisory committee remains a popular method of obtaining citizen input. The popularity, both past and present, of advisory committees is, in part, a result of the technique's apparent simplicity. All that seems necessary is a group of citizens and a program or agency for them to advise. In reality, however, there exist a number of concerns--including the choice of members, the functions of the committee, and the uses of committee input--that make the effective use of advisory committees more difficult than might be assumed. The abuse or ineffective use of advisory committees may often be traced to a neglect of these complicating factors.

Description

Advisory committees are not difficult to describe. When used as a technique of citizen participation, they consist of a group of citizens chosen to provide input and/or guidance to an agency or program of local government. Advisory committees may be associated with traditional city services, such as a citizens' advisory committee that is attached to the Parks and Recreation Department. Advisory committees such as these are permanent and provide continual citizen input to the department or program in question. In other instances, an advisory committee may be formed for a specific, but temporary, purpose. For example, a city might

establish a citizen advisory committee to assist the Parks and Recreation Department in the selection of a site for the city's new recreational center. Once the decision on the location had been made, the advisory committee would be dissolved. At any one time, a city may be served by a mixture of temporary and permanent advisory committees. Whatever the mixture and whatever the number, most advisory committees have several characteristics in common of which local officials should be aware.

Characteristics

In regard to specific structural and functional characteristics and authority patterns, advisory committees do differ. Most, however, share the four general characteristics that are listed below:

1. Advisory committees have limited authority. As a technique of citizen participation, the advisory committee is intended to provide citizens with greater access to governmental decision making, but it does not offer the citizen the opportunity to make decisions or to exert direct control over the agency.
2. Advisory committees are provided support services by the professionals on the agency or program staff. A group of citizens cannot be expected to be effective as a committee unless they are provided with secretarial support, information, and technical assistance.
3. Advisory committees are associated with a government agency, program, or specific problem/task. As such, they may be permanent or they may be formed to perform a specific function and then dissolved.

4. Advisory committees are demographically representative of the population served by the agency or program. If an advisory committee is attached to a department that serves the entire community, then the membership of the committee should roughly reflect the demographic characteristics of the entire population. If the population served is more narrow, a neighborhood for example, then the committee membership should reflect the characteristics of the neighborhood.

An awareness of these four characteristics provides a basis for understanding the advisory committee as a technique of citizen participation. In the actual formation and development of an effective advisory committee, however, there are three elements that officials must take into consideration: (1) Selection of Members, (2) Training and Information Needs, and (3) Functions of the Committee.

Selection of Members

One of the most important steps in the formation of an advisory committee is the selection of members. If the advisory committee is to serve as a method of citizen participation, then care must be exercised in order to avoid the creation of a blue-ribbon or elite committee. Blue-ribbon committees are those on which community influentials comprise the entire membership. Such blue-ribbon committees are at times legitimate and appropriate, but they should not be considered as examples of citizen participation. If the term "citizen," when linked with the term "advisory committee," is to have any meaning, then the committee should reflect the population characteristics of the community or the clients of the agency. For example, if an advisory committee is formed in association with the development of a social services plan, then the

committee should reflect the community's population characteristics since the plan will affect the entire community. On the other hand, if an advisory committee is formed to assist in the planning and design of a senior citizen center, then the membership should be reflective of the elderly residents of the community.

Matching a committee to the population served does not exclude professionals and community influentials from membership. Professionals in social service delivery and in the operation of senior citizen centers could provide valuable insights to the two committees mentioned above. Influential citizens can contribute legitimacy and political influence to an advisory committee that might lack the muscle to get anything accomplished if it were composed entirely of "ordinary" citizens. The exact composition of a committee cannot be determined without a knowledge of the program or agency to be served. As a general rule, however, care must be taken in the selection of members in order to make sure that the advisory committee is one for which the term citizen has real meaning.

Methods of appointing members to the committee are numerous. The mayor, city council, or agency personnel may be involved in the selection process. Perhaps the ideal method is to provide all those directly involved with a role in the appointment of committee members. In this way, the selection process, and thus the resultant committee, is less open to charges of bias and manipulation that might arise if there is only one individual or group selecting members.

Training and Information

Many citizen advisory committees flounder because the members have never been told what their functions are and what relation they have to the agency they are advising. It is of utmost importance that the

members be given detailed information on the role and scope of the committee. The frustrations that result when such information is not provided may cause disinterest and lack of attendance, both of which are primary factors in the demise of many advisory committees.

In addition to information on role and scope, the staff serving the advisory committee should consider the development of a training program for the members. Such a program could be conducted during regular meeting times and address such issues as the responsibilities of committee members, decision-making techniques, leadership styles, and the relationship committee members have to the rest of the community. Training and information are important for two reasons. First, officials should not assume that members have any prior knowledge of how formal committees work. This would be particularly true of low-income members and those members who have little formal education. When members are unsure of committee procedures, they may let several members who have experience with committee work dominate the process. If this dominance occurs, then the committee will be less than completely effective. Secondly, an inexperienced and uninformed committee can easily become a captive of the staff they are to advise. While some staff members may desire to control their advisory committee, it is assumed here that an effective committee is desired. Full effectiveness cannot be attained unless the advisory committee is active, aggressive, and independent of staff control. A committee that exhibits these traits is more likely to develop when committee members are provided with information and training opportunities.

Functions

Prior to a discussion of the functions that are appropriate for an advisory committee, it is necessary to indicate the type of input produced by this participatory technique. Officials of a city cannot assume that the opinions of the advisory committee are reflective or representative of the general population, even when the committee membership corresponds to the demographic characteristics of the community. In most cases, input from an advisory committee member is really input from an individual citizen representative. It is possible that the input provided will reflect the attitudes of specific population subgroups, but this would only be the case when the representative maintained close and open communication with the subgroup being represented. Given these limitations on the type of input provided, there are three general functions that may be identified: (1) provision of supplemental information, (2) education, and (3) support-building.

First, the advisory committee can be a source of information that may be used by the staff when decisions are made. Input from the advisory committee should be seen as supplemental information and should not be used as the primary data base. When advisory groups are used in this way, decision makers must remember that the advisory committee opinions are not to be taken as community opinions, When aggregate, or community, opinions are desired, other, more appropriate participatory techniques, such as the citizen survey, should be employed.

A second function that an advisory committee might perform is that of education. The information provided to the advisory committee on a program can be transmitted to other members of the community by the committee members. Since formal communication networks probably will not

exist, the performance of this function may be somewhat haphazard. But, if the advisory committee members know that one of their roles is to inform other citizens about a program or proposed service, they will add another dimension to the other information distribution efforts of the city.

The final general function of an advisory committee, and one that is related to education, is that of support-building. Members of an advisory committee may be used to build a base of support in the community for a new program that otherwise might face opposition because of a lack of information. As implied, the performance of this function may be seen as the performance of the educational function, only with the addition of a specific objective--creating support. For example, a city that decided to develop a social service component for their comprehensive plan utilized a citizen advisory committee to build support for the plan among the citizens of the community. Social service planning was new to the city, and it was thought that an informed advisory committee might be able to establish a base of support among citizens, thus reducing opposition to the concept of social service planning and easing the way for future implementation.

Once the functions of a particular advisory committee have been identified, the committee is ready to begin work. During the life of the committee, officials must remember that any input provided must be seen as input from individual representatives and not input that is representative of community views. The benefits derived by the general citizenry come not from having their views represented, rather from receiving information about programs and services that come from unbiased committee members.

Specific Purposes

Within the three general functions there are a variety of specific purposes that might underlie the formation of an advisory committee. A sampling of possible purposes is provided in the following list:

1. To obtain an additional input into decision making;
2. To obtain additional expertise;
3. To provide an opportunity for community discussion;
4. To bring together conflicting viewpoints;
5. To attempt to resolve conflict between conflicting citizen views or groups;
6. To increase citizen confidence and trust in government;
7. To serve as a sounding board for new programs or ideas;
8. To comply with federal grant requirements, state law, or a city ordinance.

Each of the examples provided is a legitimate purpose for an advisory committee. Most committees would be assigned a combination of purposes and some might be involved in all eight or more.

As mentioned at the outset, advisory committees are often an abused participatory technique. To illustrate the ways in which an advisory committee could be abused, a list of not-so-legitimate purposes is also provided:

1. To create the appearance that action is being taken, when the real intent is to stall for time;
2. To formalize the access selected interest groups have to the decision-making process;
3. To pay lip service to the idea of citizen participation (in this case, any input would be ignored);

4. To meet federal, state, or local requirements only (again, input would be ignored);
5. To act solely as a proponent or defender of the agency or program.

As with the list of acceptable purposes, the list of questionable purposes is only an illustration--there are others. Officials must avoid abusing advisory committees, or any other form of citizen participation for that matter, for if they do not, it is likely that citizens will soon become aware of the abuse. The negative outcomes of that awareness, in terms of citizen attitudes toward and confidence in government, will far outweigh the believed short term benefits derived from a misuse of the advisory committee.

Implementation

The implementation of this participatory technique is not difficult. There are no particular skills or training required so long as several guidelines are followed:

1. Match committee members with the population served;
2. Inform members of their role and scope;
3. Offer training to members;
4. Do not use the committee input as community input;
5. Provide support;
6. Do not neglect the committee or their input.

If these guidelines are followed, then the basis for a successful committee will have been provided. The only other necessary element is a sincere commitment on the part of the program or agency staff to develop an effective and active advisory committee. If the staff is committed to citizen participation in general and the use of their advisory

committee in particular, then the probability of an effective and useful committee dramatically increases.

Additional Sources of Information on Advisory Committees

Hallman, Howard W. The Organization and Operation of Neighborhood Councils: A Practical Guide. New York: Praeger Press, 1977.

Zelier, Florence. Use of Advisory Committees. Washington, D.C.: International City Management Association, 1977.

THE NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS

James J. Glass

How many times have you as an elected official or an administrator attended a meeting where a few outspoken, vocal participants dominated--debate turned into heated argument--and the only item agreed upon was the time of the next meeting? The lack of productivity of meetings is a common complaint. And, while meetings of all types may be unproductive, those designed to secure citizen input seldom seem to accomplish their intended purpose. The Nominal Group Process (NGP) is a technique of citizen participation that is designed to increase the productivity of meetings with citizens and to ensure that the objectives of such meetings are attained.

Description

The Nominal Group Process is a structured decision-making technique that follows a series of prescribed steps that lead to definite results. Participants leave an NGP meeting with a sense of accomplishment because they have reached a consensus on the question posed to them at the outset of the meeting. Thus, NGP eliminates the frustration inherent in most group efforts.

The key to understanding the Nominal Group Process is an awareness that each NGP meeting focuses on a single question. For example, city officials may be interested in identifying what citizens see as problems in the recreational programs offered by the city. The subject on which information is desired, in this case recreation, is formulated into a question: What problems have you or a member of your family experienced when participating in city recreation programs? It is a question such as

this that provides the initial structure to the Nominal Group Process. Additionally, the focus on a single question produces much more detailed information on the subject than would normally be provided. By following the steps outlined below, participants will end a NGP meeting with a ranked list of responses to the question.

The primary advantage of NGP, when compared to traditional, unstructured meetings between city officials and citizens, is that decision makers are provided with information that they can use when formulating decisions. Usable information is produced because participants have agreed upon specific responses and have ranked those responses according to their importance. Since usable information is produced by the Nominal Group Process, satisfaction should be expressed by both city officials and citizens. Satisfaction with the results of a citizen participation project is important, for without it officials and citizens may become so frustrated with participation programs that further efforts are abandoned.

The Process

The following discussion provides an introduction to the Nominal Group Process. It is not intended to be used as a comprehensive users guide. Many of the details have been omitted because of space limitations. Those interested in the implementation of NGP should consult one or more of the sources listed at the end of the section.

Materials Needed.--A number of easily obtained and inexpensive materials are necessary for a NGP meeting. These materials are listed below. Their use will be indicated when the steps of the process are discussed.

1. Flip-chart
2. Masking tape
3. Felt-tipped marker
4. Work sheets
5. 3 x 5 cards

Meeting Space.--Nominal Group Process meetings should be conducted in a room where all participants are able to sit around one large table. The table should comfortably accommodate five to nine people, the minimum and maximum size of a nominal group. The meeting room and the group size requirements are easily explained. Since the intent of a NGP is to create a group, or team, atmosphere, a table where participants can see one another is used, primarily for psychological reasons. Regarding the size requirements, groups of fewer than five members do not produce enough ideas, and groups of more than nine tend to produce too many ideas to deal with effectively.

The limitations on group size seem restrictive, but larger groups can be divided into subgroups of the appropriate size. The responses to the individual subgroups can then be merged by the city staff or by holding another NGP meeting that is attended by a representative from each of the subgroups.

Steps in the Process.--Normally, the Nominal Group Process consists of six steps, with the possibility of three additional steps if they are needed. With six steps the process should be completed in an hour and a half or less; if the three steps are added, the process will require an additional 20 minutes.

NGP Steps

1.	Introduction	10 minutes
2.	Silent response to question	10 minutes
3.	Round-robin listing of responses	30 minutes
4.	Serial discussion of items listed	15 minutes
5.	Selection and ranking of items	10 minutes
6.	Tabulation of results	5 minutes
7.	Discussion of ranked items	10 minutes
8.	Selection and second ranking	5 minutes
9.	Tabulation of results	5 minutes

Steps seven through nine are actually a repeat of steps four, five, and six.

The Nominal Group Process begins with an introduction by the session leader. In the introduction the leader briefly explains the purpose of the meeting, the way that NGP works, and what it is intended to accomplish. Ideally, all participants will have been provided with some explanatory materials on NGP before the meeting. Although the provision of such material is not necessary, the process works better when all involved understand the concept of NGP and know what to expect during the meeting.

After the introduction, the work sheets with the question and sufficient space for participant responses are distributed. The leader directs the group to respond in writing to the question and to maintain silence even if they finish before the allotted time. The leader tells the participants that the responses are to be stated in concise three-to-five word phrases. With this step, as with all others, the time frame must be strictly enforced. If the leader allows one or two

participants to take 30 minutes to finish, the attention and patience of the rest of the group will be diminished.

After the participants have written their responses to the question, the leader goes around the table and asks each person for one item from his list. Each response is numbered and listed on the flip-chart with a felt-tipped marker for easy reading. As each page is filled, it is taped to the wall in full view of all participants. The round-robin listing continues until all responses have been recorded. During this step there is no discussion. The leader, or a recorder if the leader's handwriting is not legible, must list each response as stated by the participant. No editing should be done. If the participant gives a long, wordy statement, the leader may ask him to rephrase the response into a shorter version, but the leader should not assist the participant in the rephrasing even if asked. The intent of this step is to allow the participants to see their ideas recorded as they said them, resulting in a sense of satisfaction for the participants and elimination of possible feelings of control and manipulation. During this step, participants must not be forced to respond if they hesitate in giving an item from their list. If someone does pass during a round, they may provide a response the next time their turn comes. Furthermore, participants should be encouraged to add to their list during this step if the response of another participant suggests an additional idea to them. The objectives of the first two steps are to encourage the development of as many ideas as possible and to allow each participant to make a contribution to the meeting. The objectives are accomplished by means of silent recording, listing responses as stated, not forcing hesitant participants and allowing additions to the participants' lists as the recording process progresses.

The next step is to discuss each item on the list briefly for purposes of clarification. Again, there is no debate; the intent is to make sure that all the participants have a similar understanding of each item on the list. Clarification may be provided by anyone and not just by the original respondent. If no one in the group has a question about a particular item, it is skipped. It is during this step that debate and arguments are most likely to occur. If they do, it is the leader's responsibility to stop them as quickly and as gently as possible.

After clarification, the 3 x 5 cards are distributed, and each participant is asked to select the five most important items on the list. At this time the participant writes the item in the center of the card and the number of the item in the upper left hand corner of the card. Once the five items have been selected, each person is asked to rank the items in the following manner. The leader asks the participants to spread all their cards out in front of them. They are then told to select the most important item from those they have selected and to place the number five in the lower right hand corner of the card, underlining it three times. From the remaining four items the participants are asked to pick the least important item and to place a one in the lower right hand corner, again underlining it three times. The process is then repeated. From the remaining three cards the most important is selected and given a four; then the last two cards, the least important is selected and given a two; the last item receives a three. In each case, the ranking is written in the lower right hand corner and underlined three times.

Although this ranking process sounds as though one were leading a group of elementary school children through a lesson, it is done in this

way for two reasons. First, the placement and underlining of the rating reduces the possibility of confusing item numbers and ranking numbers during the tabulation. Second, the selection of the most, then the least, important items allows participants to choose between extremes, rather than having to order their items from the most to the least important all at one time. As a result, the ranking should be more valid.

Once the ranking has been completed, the cards are collected and shuffled. Someone reads the item number and its ranking from each card, and the leader records the rank next to each item on the list. When finished, the ranks of each item are summed into a final score. (For example, if item number fourteen received rankings of five, three, and one, its score is nine.) The scores of the items determine the ranked priorities of the group. In most cases there will be clear breaks between groups of items. Several will receive very high scores; some will receive middle-range scores; and the rest receive low scores or no score at all. If no breaks result, or if there are obvious discrepancies (several items receiving both ones and fives for example), then discussion, selection, and ranking steps may be repeated.

After the results have been tabulated for the final time, the leader closes the process by informing the group how the information will be used. If at all possible, the participants should be kept informed about the program or problem for which their input was sought as the input they provided is utilized by officials.

Advantages and Disadvantages of NGP

In addition to producing a useful end product, NGP has several other advantages that should be noted. The silent response to the question and the round-robin recording of ideas encourages equality of

participation and eliminates the domination of the meeting by the most vocal participants. The silent recording and round-robin listing also produce a more comprehensive set of ideas than do typical group discussions where one or two ideas often hold the group's attention. Finally, not only are arguments avoided, but the structured process allows conflicting ideas to receive the equal attention of the group.

As with all participatory techniques, NGP does suffer from some disadvantages. Although NGP can be used with larger groups through the creation of subgroups, the process becomes more unwieldly as the size of the group increases. As a result, NGP is ideal when information is sought from a small identifiable group, or when representatives of larger groups can be selected as NGP participants. A second problem associated with NGP, and one common to most participatory techniques, is getting citizens to participate in the meetings. A solid foundation must be built prior to the NGP meeting. Citizens selected as participants must be informed of the importance of the project, told what to expect, and encouraged to participate. These steps will not result in perfect attendance, but they should cause more people to attend than if such action were not taken. Finally, NGP is not appropriate in all situations where citizen input is desired. The technique is most useful when officials want to identify citizen needs or to obtain citizen input prior to program or solution design. Additionally, NGP is most appropriate when the information sought pertains to a specific problem or question. For example one NGP meeting could not be used to identify the problems associated with several city services, although it could be used to identify those services citizens experience the most problems with.

The Use of NGP

NGP is not a difficult technique to understand or to use. If no one on the city staff has used NGP before, however, it is suggested that an experienced NGP session leader be contacted to train several city staffers in NGP. These staffers can then conduct NGP meetings themselves, or they in turn can train others, perhaps citizens, to conduct the meetings. Advice on the implementation of NGP is necessary for two reasons. First, the formation of the NGP question is a very important step. If a question is either too general or too technical, it will not produce as many useful responses. Someone experienced in the process can provide useful insights into the art of NGP question construction. Secondly, potential NGP session leaders should be walked through an NGP session themselves. By doing this, session leaders will be exposed to some of the unexpected occurrences that NGP instructional materials cannot anticipate, as well as becoming more familiar with the various steps. Much of the success of an NGP session is dependent upon the skill of the session leader. If the leader is not properly trained, some of the advantages of NGP will be lost.

Additional Sources of Information on NGP

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CITIZEN SURVEYS

John R. Todd

Nature and Uses of Citizen Surveys

The citizen survey is a planned, systematic method of gathering information from citizens. This definition calls attention to several important attributes of the citizen survey that deserve brief underscoring. First, since the citizen survey is an information-gathering device, its purpose is to get input and feedback from the people. It provides the city with an opportunity to find out what the citizens think before undertaking a program, and it also provides an opportunity to find out what citizens think about something the city is doing or has already done. Second, the citizen survey is differentiated from some other methods of citizen participation (such as citizen complaints, city council attendance, etc.) because it is planned. The city takes the initiative in this type of procedure, determining what kind of information is to be sought and from whom. Third, the survey is a systematic method of information gathering. It relies upon a method of selecting informants which provides representation for all relevant groups in the population. This is a decided contrast to the self-selection methods characteristic of most other forms of citizen participation. Finally, the citizen survey gathers information directly from the people. It is based on the premise that the best way to know about the citizens and what they are thinking is to ask them.

This planned, systematic technique--the citizen survey--is useful in securing several types of information. (This discussion draws heavily on Webb and Hatry, 1973, and Weiss & Hatry, 1971.) These types of information can be grouped together under several categories: (1) input and

feedback concerning services, (2) input on unmet community needs, (3) budgetary input, (4) opinions on community issues, and (5) perceptions of governmental accessibility. Each of these will be discussed in turn, with a few examples provided for each.

Input and Feedback Concerning Services.--One of the things citizens can provide a city government is an estimate of its performance. While citizen evaluations of services should probably not be used as a single measure of performance (Scott, 1976), they are certainly one important means by which a city can judge how well it is meeting citizen needs. City surveys ask about evaluation of services in a variety of ways. Some ask people to rate services on a scale (e.g., from +3 for best performance to -3 for poorest), while others ask citizens to evaluate services in such categories as "excellent, good, fair, poor." The average evaluations given are one useful gauge of service quality.

In addition to service evaluation, citizen surveys can collect useful data about service utilization. For example, they can ask citizens whether they use a service "several times a week, once a week, once a month, less than once a month." In addition to the actual utilization data, citizens can be asked about reasons for using, or failing to use, various services. Cities may also wish to estimate potential utilization for planned services by asking citizens how often they think they would use a service. While potential utilization data are probably not as reliable as actual use data, they provide a base for planning which is superior to no estimates or "seat-of-the-pants" estimates. A final type of information about services cities can collect concerns awareness of services and its effect on service utilization.

Input on Unmet Community Needs.--In addition to gathering data about existing services, a city can use the citizen survey as an opportunity to estimate the importance of certain problems within the community and thereby gauge the need for new governmental programs. For example, the need for such services as animal control or pest control may be estimated by asking people to what extent they are bothered by the problem.

Perceptions of Governmental Accessibility.--City governments are often concerned about the extent to which citizens feel that they can have some influence over governmental outcomes. They may ask questions about citizen perceptions of their ability to get the city to handle a complaint promptly and equitably. Or they may simply ask citizens whether or not they feel that they can have a say in the way things are done in the city government. Both types of information can be helpful to the city in estimating the degree to which citizens feel alienated from their city government.

Options on Community Issues.--At the time of a citizen survey a community may have one or more key issues before it which will be resolved in the future. The survey is a valuable opportunity to ask citizens about their preferences among alternatives under consideration. Whatever the issue may be--high utility rates, community health services, etc.--valuable input can be achieved by asking for citizen preferences. Also, a valuable sense of involvement can be created among the citizenry by seeking their opinions.

Budgetary Input.--Sometimes surveys seek citizen guidance in the difficult choices required in raising revenue and allocating scarce financial resources among competing programs. On the revenue side of

the budgetary question, cities may wish to ask about citizen preferences among alternative revenue producing techniques (e.g., alternative taxes, user charges, fees, etc.) They may also wish to ask about citizen perceptions of the equity of various revenue measures.

Acquiring useful information about the spending side of the budgetary process presents some difficult problems. One of the more common ways of inquiring about spending preferences asks citizens to indicate for each of several services whether they would like to see the city spend more, spend less, or spend about the same. The problem with this type of question is that citizens are not required to consider the necessity to pay for services. Consequently, they almost always express a preference for more spending. Various techniques have been used to try to curb this tendency. One approach ties spending preferences to taxing consequences by asking people if they would like to see the city spend more even if it should require higher taxes. The evidence suggests, however, that the qualifying phrase does not have much inpact. Another device designed to curb the ubiquitous tendency to prefer more is called a budget pie. (Clark, 1974) This device calls upon respondents to divide a budget pie into segments representing the share of the budget which should be allocated to each of a list of services. This technique makes respondents face the fact of limited resources and consider tradeoffs between potential programs. While this device has not been fully tested, one study indicates that it does not work well among lower income groups because the task is too difficult for them to grasp readily. (McIver and Ostrom, 1976) Overall, it appears that data regarding budgetary preferences are among the least useful and the most likely to be misleading.

Gathering Reliable Data Using Citizen Surveys

The citizen survey can be a useful means of citizen input, but cities must be concerned about the reliability of the information gathered. That is, they must ask whether the technique produces dependable estimates of the views of the citizenry. Attention must be given to several factors in assuring reliability: (1) the method of data collection, (2) the size of the sample, (3) the method of selecting survey respondents, (4) question wording, and (5) the selection of someone to plan and administer the survey. Each of these requires some comment.

Method of Collecting Data.--Citizen surveys can be conducted in three basic ways, with some studies combining methods. These three methods are: (1) mail questionnaires, (2) in-person interviews, and (3) telephone interviews. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

The mail questionnaire method gathers information from a questionnaire which is mailed to the respondent, self-administered, and then returned for coding and analysis. The primary attraction of this method is its relatively low cost. The primary disadvantage of the method is its low return rate. As one source indicated, " . . . mail response rates for the general population rarely exceed 50 percent without extensive followup" (Weiss & Hatry, 1971:22). Such low response rates are problematic because of potential response bias. That is, some groups are more likely to complete the questionnaire and return it than others. Consequently, the results are likely to be less than a reliable estimate of opinion for the entire community.

The second means of conducting a survey is by in-person interviews. This approach uses trained interviewers to go to the home of respondents and ask them questions from an interview schedule. It has several advantages. First, it has much less of a response-rate problem than the mail questionnaire. Second, it permits the use of open-ended questions which give respondents freedom to express themselves without the guidance of preordained alternative answers. Third, it may provide a check on the reliability of information since the interviewer may be able to judge, at least in some cases, whether or not questions have been properly understood and make useful notes about that. The principle disadvantage of the in-person interview technique is cost since interviewers must be paid for their time and expenses. To cut expenses, several techniques can be used. Letters to respondents explaining the purpose of the survey and urging people to participate may cut the refusal rate. Some surveys have included telephone calls to respondents to set up appointments for interviews so that call-back costs can be cut. Others have used call-backs by telephone to eliminate in person call-backs after one or some prespecified number of attempts to conduct interviews in person. The telephone call-back cuts down on interviewer time and expenses. Occasionally it may be possible to cut interviewer costs by using volunteer interviewers or by using existing city staff personnel, but this generally results in interviews of poorer quality unless unusual care is taken in training interviewers.

The third method of conducting a survey is by telephone interviews. This method was frowned upon until recently because telephones were not widely enough distributed in most communities to give all significant groups a fair opportunity to be drawn into the sample. The method was

especially likely to discriminate against low-income groups. More recent data suggest that telephone availability has significantly increased. One study estimates that by 1976 about 90 percent of the people had telephones in their own homes. That study concludes, "Now that telephone surveys can encompass more than nine-tenths of the population, we can feel less concerned that the biases due to coverage will grossly distort our results" (Klecka and Tuchfarber, 1978:106). An interview which is to be conducted over the telephone must usually be shorter than the in-person interview. The Urban Institute reports that it customarily has attempted to keep telephone interviews under fifteen minutes in length, but that longer interviews have been successfully completed (Webb & Hatry, 1973:47). The telephone survey, therefore, seems most appropriate for shorter surveys on specific topics, rather than for the more general purpose survey.

Of the three methods of collecting survey data, most experts would still stress the in-person interview as the best method. Where resources can be mustered to support it, it is still probably the best choice. Telephone surveys would be next most suitable, with the mail survey the last choice.

Determining the Sample Size.--A second decision to be made which may influence survey reliability is the choice of a sample size. Making this choice requires that two prior decisions be made: (1) the amount of error which would be tolerable, and (2) the amount of certainty which we require of our survey results. In survey methodology the first choice is called the choice of a sampling error, while the second is called the choice of a confidence level. A complete exposition of the meaning of these concepts would require more space than is available here. We will simply try to get a conceptual, or intuitive understanding of each term.

The term sampling error indicates for a proportion estimated from the sample the range within which the true population proportion would fall. For example, a sampling error of 3 percent means that, when sample results indicate that 45 percent favor a particular policy, the true percent favoring it in the population as a whole would be between 42 and 48 percent. The size of the sampling error that may be tolerable depends upon the degree of precision required by those who will use the survey results. In most surveys the goal is to keep sampling error between 3 and 5 percent.

The confidence level, as the name suggests, is an estimate of the odds that our results are in fact reliable within the range we have chosen. It is common to choose the 95 percent confidence level in surveys. This means that we want to be certain that 95 times out of 100 the sample will produce results which fall within the chosen range of sampling error.

Fortunately the sample sizes necessary to reach various combinations of sampling error and confidence levels are now fairly readily available from prepared tables. (See, for example, Babbie, 1973:376.) Consequently, once the decisions have been made concerning sampling error and confidence levels, sample sizes can easily be read from the tables. For highly complex sample designs using stratification and oversampling, tables are usually not adequate, and it is best to consult someone trained in the mathematics of probability samples to determine sample size and how it should be allocated among the various strata.

The size of the sample required varies directly with the degree of precision and confidence which is demanded. The smaller the sampling error and the higher the confidence level demanded, the larger the sample must be. Naturally, the larger the sample, the higher the cost is of conducting the survey. Consequently, survey planners must usually consider tradeoffs between precision and cost in making the final selection of a sample

size. Of course, below a certain sample size, results become too unreliable and the survey becomes a pure cost with no benefits.

Method of Selecting Citizens to be Interviewed.--After choosing a method of collecting the survey responses, a plan must be chosen for selecting citizens to be interviewed. A representative sample is the general goal to be sought in selecting respondents. A sample is considered to be representative if the major groups in the population are represented in the sample in roughly the same proportion they are represented in the community. For example, if blacks make up 10 percent of the community population then, the sample should contain approximately 10 percent blacks also. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to have a clear definition of the population to be sampled and then select a good sampling procedure.

Defining the population may seem easy for a community survey. The natural response would be that the population to be sampled is the community. But, in reality not all residents of the community are of interest. Children should be excluded; it may be desirable to exclude institutionalized populations. Thus, for many community surveys the population might be defined as composed of adults living in private households. Of course, for special purpose surveys, the population may be even more specialized. If the community is concerned with gauging the need for various programs for the elderly, it might define the population to be sampled as composed of those citizens of the community whose age is 65 or over. The important thing to remember is that those planning the community survey must have a clear understanding of what group they wish to know about before the survey is begun. Confusion about the nature of the population may cause sampling mistakes to be made which are irreparable once the survey is completed.

Once the population is defined, the next step is generally to search for a sampling frame. A sampling frame is a list of all of the people who fall into the population defined or a list of units containing the population from which the sample is to be drawn. (See Babbie, 1973:81.) In some cases an actual list of the population may be available, but this is likely to be true only for small, specialized populations,(e.g., a list of households or dwelling units.) Survey planners must, therefore, search for the list that comes as close as possible to listing the survey population. They must guard against settling for a list which will be systematically biased; i.e., one which is likely to exclude from the sample some significant group. For example, one might be inclined to use utility billing-lists as a sampling frame for a community survey. But such a list would be useful only if individual utility billings were common for multi-family dwelling units. Where individual billing is not used for apartment buildings, certain groups would be underrepresented in the sample.

Most community surveys today are likely to use a list of dwelling units as the sampling frame. Such a list is potentially available from several sources. For cities with over 50,000 population, block data from the U.S. Census Bureau would provide a list of houses. The usefulness of this sampling frame is obviously greatest in the years immediately following a decennial census and declines thereafter. Lists of dwelling units may also be available from city planning departments. The value of these lists also depends on how frequently they are made and updated. Finally, household lists may be available from private companies which compile telephone listings arranged by street rather than alphabetically by resident's name. The age of these directories would affect their utility just as it does other kinds of household lists. A further

drawback of telephone directories is the difficulty they may present in distinguishing between multiple telephone listings in a single-family dwelling unit and a genuine multi-family dwelling unit. In some cases considerable work may be necessary to take an existing list and update it, correct it, or rearrange it for use in sampling. While the tasks may seem petty and onerous, this process is too important to be slighted. The better the sampling frame, the better is the sample which can be drawn.

An important question to consider in sampling design is whether or not the sample is to be stratified. If the sample is to be stratified, then the sampling frame must first be divided into groups, or strata, and sampling must be done from each group according to the overall sample design. The most common reason for stratifying a sample is to guarantee that it will include a sufficiently large number of respondents from some subgroup in the population to permit analysis of their answers to the survey question apart from the rest of the sample and to permit comparisons with other significant groups in the sample. This procedure is particularly important if the group of interest does not make up a significant proportion of the city's population. In such cases, even if sampling procedure is highly accurate the sample would contain too few cases to permit reliable estimates of subgroup opinions. For example, it may seem desirable to be able to make comparisons between the opinions of blacks and whites in a community in which the population is only 10 percent black. If the total sample size were 400, then only 40 of the respondents could be expected to be black. It would be necessary, therefore, to find a procedure for stratifying the sample by race and then oversampling from the black stratum. It should be noted that while stratifying and

oversampling may increase the ability to make subgroup comparisons in analysis of the survey results, oversampling complicates the problem of estimating opinions for the community as a whole. To estimate for the community where some groups have been oversampled requires the use of a weight factor to diminish the effect of the opinions of the oversampled group. Thus while stratifying and oversampling may increase the analytical potential of the survey data, they make estimating overall opinion more complex. The choice between a simple unstratified design and a more complex stratified design can be made only with some clear notion of the purposes of the survey in mind. Probably the best rule is to use the simplest survey design which will accomplish the purposes of survey.

With a sampling frame chosen and a decision made about whether to stratify, a procedure must be chosen for selecting households. The most common procedure used is one called systematic sampling (Babbie, 1973: 92ff). In this procedure, a skip interval is chosen by dividing the total number of units in the sampling frame by the size of the sample. For example if the sample size is to be 400 and the sampling frame has 12,000 units in it, then the skip interval would be 30. To begin the selection process, a number between one and thirty must be randomly selected (e.g., by placing all the numbers between one and thirty on pieces of paper, placing them in a hat, and drawing one). After the first household is selected, every thirtieth household thereafter is selected, following some rule which stipulates the order in which the households shall be considered. If some stratum is to be oversampled then a skip interval would be used for it that is different from that used for the remainder of the sample. The result of systematic sampling should be a representative sample, or one which oversamples according to prior design.

Once the households are selected, respondents must be selected from each. The respondent selection key is a useful procedure at this stage. The respondent to be selected is determined by certain characteristics of the household (e.g., number of people, number of men, etc.). (See Backstrom & Hursh, 1963:50ff.) Coupling this procedure with a systematic sampling of dwelling units should produce a reasonably representative sample of the citizenry.

Of course the procedures outlined so far are those appropriate for the in-person interview method. It is important to mention the procedure to be used with the telephone survey. Probably the most attractive procedure for this type of survey is called random digit dialing. After ascertaining the prefixes in use within a community, the households to be interviewed are randomly chosen by selecting the last four digits of the telephone number from a table of random numbers (or in more sophisticated settings the number selection process may be mechanized or computerized). Then something like the respondent selection key is used to select a respondent at the number reached. The principle advantage of the random digit procedure with telephone surveys is that it makes those with unlisted numbers potentially part of the sample. The disadvantage is that it is not possible to screen out the numbers of businesses in advance and thus some time is wasted for interviewers. While the random digit survey is still controversial, one study repeated an in-person interview survey with such a telephone survey and got much the same results as the in-person interview survey (Klecka and Tuchfarber, 1978). Thus the procedure may be increasingly attractive when interviews can be kept short.

Question Wording.--In addition to respondent selection method and data collection method, question wording is the third major factor influencing survey reliability. The important rule in question wording is to make questions as neutral as possible so as to avoid suggesting answers. In citizen surveys it is important to avoid loading questions down with descriptive clauses which lead the respondent to a particular conclusion. For example, if asking about tax cut preferences, one could load the question by asking if the respondent endorsed a tax cut even if it meant the quality of the schools would be destroyed. Such a question would be clearly leading. More neutrally the survey might ask if the respondent endorsed a tax cut even if it forced some reduction in school services and programs. Survey planners need to be sensitive to such problems and guard against them. One useful means of checking against even unintentional bias in question-wording is to have an advisory body review the interview schedule and comment on proposed questions before the survey. Great care needs to be taken here to preserve the credibility and utility of the survey.

In-House vs. Contracted-Out Surveys.--One broader question which may affect survey reliability is whether the city should undertake the survey with its own personnel or contract it out to a university or private agency. The answer depends on the background and training of the city personnel. Unless personnel are available who have some training in survey methodology, the method is likely to be abused and the results misleading if a city tries to run a survey on its own. Planning a survey and drawing a sample requires some care and skill. A city should carefully assess the skills of its own personnel before deciding. Retaining the survey in-house is tempting because it is likely to be cheaper than contracting it out. But if the cost of saving money is a useless survey, then nothing is really saved, and city personnel

have needlessly been diverted from their regular jobs. The Urban Institute suggests, therefore, that only fairly large cities attempt to run their own surveys (Webb & Hatry, 1973:59ff).

Analyzing the Data

Analysis of citizen surveys generally focuses on two types of information. On the one hand, those using the survey will want to know about the attitudes of the citizenry as a whole. For example, we may want to know how the people as a whole evaluate various city services. For this type of information the frequency distribution with percentages is the most appropriate mode of analysis. (See, for example, Table I.) On the other hand we may want to know about subgroup variation in response to various survey items. For example, we may want to know how blacks and whites compare in their evaluations of certain services. In this case, responses to service evaluations can be crosstabulated by race to form a table like that in Table II. In the crosstabulation we compare responses between subgroups to the same questions. More sophisticated analyses can be carried out for specialized purposes, but these two types will generally meet the needs of the users of citizen surveys.

Abuses of Citizen Surveys

While surveys are certainly useful tools for obtaining citizen input, they are sometimes used in less than laudable ways. One such undesirable use is to run a survey as a symbolic gesture to give citizens a sense that their opinions are valued, but then to ignore the results when making important decisions. Another abuse of the survey technique involves taking citizens beyond their capabilities. That is, they may be asked to respond to highly technical issues beyond the average citizen's grasp.

When the questions are over the citizen's head, the responses are necessarily meaningless. For example, asking citizens whether the city should produce its own electrical power or purchase it from a private source requires more analytical skill and more knowledge than the average citizen can muster. However, asking the citizens may permit city leaders to avoid making difficult decisions themselves. Such surveys should be avoided. A final abuse of surveys involves allowing citizens' short-run preferences to override the long-run needs of the community. Elected officials must accept the responsibility for leadership in such situations and not allow surveys to guide the city down the wrong path.

The survey is highly useful if well designed and well used. A poorly designed survey can be a curse to all. An ignored survey is a waste and a blow to the principle of governmental responsiveness.

Additional Sources of Information on Citizen Surveys

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TABLE I

EXPENDITURES FOR CITY SERVICES

	Feel City Should:		
	Spend More	Spend Less	Spend Same
Fire Protection	29%	1%	70%
Police Protection	27	5	58
Neighborhood Parks and Playgrounds	59	4	37
Recreation Centers, Swimming Pools, Lakes and Other Recreation Facilities	53	3	44
Garbage Collection	17	2	81
Collection of Branches, Leaves, and Large Items	16	4	81
Sidewalks	56	4	40
Street Cleaning	26	7	67
Street Maintenance and Repair	60	3	37
Beautification with Trees, Flowers, Shrubs on Public Land	40	6	54
Library Services	27	2	71
Traffic Signs and Signals in Your Neighborhood	27	7	66

TABLE 2

PERCENT FAVORING GREATER EXPENDITURE FOR

SERVICES BY OWNER/RENTER STATUS

Feel city should spend more for:	Owners	Renters
Fire Protection	23 %	37 %
Police Protection	33	42
Parks and Playground	49	70
Recreation Centers	40	67
Garbage Collection	13	22
Leaf/Branch Pickup	11	22
Sidewalks	46	67
Street Cleaning	19	33
Street Maintenance	50	71
Beautification of Public Lands	32	49
Library Services	20	36
Neighborhood Traffic Signs/Signals	20	34